

Remnant V2 is sensitive to register

Pierre Larrivé, Université de Caen Normandie & CRISCO

Some syntactic phenomena are part of the immediate competence of speakers, and some are found in normative written practice. An example is provided by post-verbal use of French clitics (known as subject ‘inversion’). Such uses are absent from vernacular productions of contemporary speakers (Palasis 2013, Culberston and Legendre 2008) who acquire it latter with at a level of command similar to a second-language feature (Meisel, Elsig and Bonnesen 2011). Because the competence of speakers of earlier states of languages can only be reconstructed from traces of written practice, separating features of the vernacular and of the normative registers appear essential. One method to do so is presented here in relation to a declining configuration found in Medieval French. V2 is a construction in which the verb is in second position, following an initial projection (XP) (Wolfe 2018 and references therein). Crucially, since Skårup (1975), Thiersch (1978) and den Besten (1982), both the initial XP and the verb are generally assumed to be in the left periphery of the clause. This is demonstrated by unambiguous configurations where the XP is a projection other than the subject, as in the cases below where the verb and the XP (whether it be an argument or adjunct as in (1), a particle or connector as in (2) or a coordinator (3)) both stand above the expressed subject.

- (1) Cele semblance ... poons nos veoir
That figure ... can.1PL we see.inf
‘We can see that figure’ (Wolfe 2018a: 70)
- (2) Si est ore avenue la semblance de l’Evangile
si be.3sg now come.PTCP the figure of the-Gospel
‘Now the appearance of the Gospel has arrived’ (Wolfe 2018a: 73)
- (3) Et disoit l’escript ainsi ...
and say-PST-3SG the writing thus
‘and the written document read the following ...’ (Zimmermann and Kaiser 2010: 267)

A number of recent studies have sought to characterize the trajectory and characteristic properties of Medieval French V2. The variance in their results is the **research problem** that we tackle here. With respect to rate of use, whereas work based on 13th century prose literary sources cite figures of between 17% and 30% of V2 among all clauses (Radwan 2011, Meklenborg Salvesen and Bech 2014, Marchello-Nizia 2018, Kaiser and Zimmermann 2011), 13th century prose legal sources yield 3.7% of unambiguous V2. With respect to the informational value of left-peripheral argument and adjunct XPs, whereas Larrivé (2019) and Ingham (2018) converge in finding virtually categorical discourse-old XPs with unambiguous V2 in 13th century prose, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2018) discover a near-categorical discourse-new Focus value for preverbal objects in verse texts between 1090 and 1200, and Radwan no specific value for V2 in 13th century literary prose. These issues are important because the former tells us whether V2 is a central word order of 13th century French or merely a particular construction; and the latter because it indicates whether the configuration is driven by formal syntactic requirements or informational dynamics.

The formulated **hypothesis** is that such variance relates to the register of the investigated texts. The role of register on rate of use and informational value of XP is verified in three register-differentiated Anglo-Normand prose legal texts from the 1260-1300 period – 1270’s court dialogues from the Anglo-Norman Year Books Corpus, 1290’s petitions to the king from the PROME corpus and 1260’s legal treatise *Fet asaver*. The first has been demonstrated to be less formal than the second (Ingham 2016), which should be less formal than the third. Each clause in a continuous sequence containing 50 occurrences of V2 is annotated manually for realization and position of the subject; the nature of left-peripheral projections; the informational value of left-peripheral arguments and adjuncts, using for comparability the formalized decision-tree proposed in Larrivé (2019). If the hypothesis is correct, the rate of unambiguous V2 should be greater and the informational value of XPs more varied as the register of the text is more formal.

These expectations are supported by the research **results**. On rate, unambiguous V2 is three times more frequent in the most formal, legal treatise text than it is in the less formal, court dialogues, at rates that are highly statistically significant and that for the most formal text compare to those cited for literary material. On informational value, there is a tendency for the handful of initial projections with Focus value to be more numerous in more formal texts, although the numbers in the 2000 clauses annotated are too small to be statistically significant. Statistical significance is however found in the relation between Focus XP triggering null subjects and text formality.

The **significance** of the results is that they explain the disparities in the current quantitative studies of a distinctive configuration of Medieval French: higher rates of V2 and of Focus XP correlate to text formality. This suggests that V2 is a register marker, as is also the case in Portuguese (Galves 2019), and that it may not have been a part of the immediate competence of 13th century speakers. This dynamics may explain why V2 is on a declining curve in French, whereas it is growing in Old High German (Cichosz 2010). These observations open a comparative perspective for the study of marked word-orders like V2, which may be distinguished not only by variation in the informational values of XPs (Holmberg 2015) but more generally by the types of XPs, and by restriction to normative registers. It may be that specialization of remnant V2 in normative register is a factor in the loss of the configuration in Romance.

- Cichosz, Anna. 2010. *The influence of text type on word order of Old Germanic Languages*. Peter Lang.
- Culberston, J. & G. Legendre. 2008. Qu'en est-il des clitiques sujet en français oral contemporain? *Congrès mondial de linguistique française*. Paris: CMLF.
- den Besten, Hans. 1983. On the interaction of root transformations and lexical deletive rules. Werner Abrahams (Ed.), *On the formal syntax of the Westgermania*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 47-131.
- Galves, Charlotte. 2019. *V2 in the history of Portuguese – a corpus-based study*. Presentation, SLE, Leipzig.
- Holmberg, Anders. 2015. Verb second. In Tibor Kiss & Artemis Alexiadou (eds.), *Syntax—Theory and Analysis. An International Handbook*, vol. 1, 242–283. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ingham, Richard. 2018. Topic, Focus and null subjects in Old French. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 63(2), 242–263.
- Ingham, Richard. 2016. Investigating language change using Anglo-Norman spoken and written register data. *Linguistics* 54,2, 381-410.
- Kaiser, Georg A. & Michael Zimmermann. 2011. On the decrease in subject-verb inversion in French declaratives. Esther Rinke & Tanja Kupisch (Eds.). *The Development of grammar : Language acquisition and diachronic change: In honour of Jürgen M. Meisel*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins. 355-381.
- Labelle, Marie & Paul Hirschbühler. 2018. Topic and focus in Old French V1 and V2 structures. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 63,2, 264-287.
- Larrivée, Pierre. 2019. *To be or not to be informational: Preverbal complements in Medieval French V2 configurations*. *Glossa* 4,1, 1-19.
- Marchello-Nizia, Christiane. 2018. De SO à SV : Vers le sujet obligatoire et antéposé en français, les dernières phases d'un changement. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 28, 1-19.
- Meisel, Jürgen, Martin Elsig & Matthias Bonnesen. 2011. Delayed grammatical acquisition in first language development: Subject-verb *inversion* and subject clitics in French interrogatives. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* 1,4, 347–390.
- Palasis, Katerina. 2013. The case for diglossia : Describing the emergence of two grammars in the early acquisition of Metropolitan French. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 23,1, 17-35.
- Radwan, Sonja. 2011. *L'ordre des mots en ancien français. La syntaxe et la structure informationnelle de la zone préverbale*. MA dissertation, Universitetet i Oslo.
- Salvesen, Christine Meklenborg & Kristin Bech. 2014. Post-verbal subjects in Old English and Old French. *Oslo Studies in Language (OSLa)* 6,1, 201-228.
- Skårup, Povl. 1975. *Les premières zones de la proposition en ancien français. Essai de syntaxe de position*. Etudes romanes de l'université de Copenhague.
- Thiersch, Craig. 1978. *Topics in German syntax*. PhD, MIT.
- Wolfe, Sam. 2018. *Verb Second in Medieval Romance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.